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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 001827

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SUBJECT: MUTUAL RECRIMINATIONS CONTINUE AHEAD OF LIEN
BEIJING VISIT

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason: 1.4 (B/D)

11. (C) Summary: President Chen Shui-bian and KMT Chairman Lien Chan used public fora in Taipei and Singapore to trade another round of public accusations. During an April 16 speech, President Chen asked mockingly if the KMT's upcoming talks with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were aimed at losing Taiwan, just as the last round of KMT-CCP talks in 1945 resulted in the loss of Mainland China. Speaking in Singapore on April 17, Lien blamed Chen's "populism" for ruining Taiwan's economy. Despite the mutual recriminations, neither side has formally rejected some sort of consultations before Lien's departure. Taiwan's National Security Council (NSC) believes that Lien will make some sort of report to Chen before he leaves in order to protect himself from charges of undermining the government. The NSC assesses that it is now the KMT, rather than Beijing, that is pushing for a substantive agreement during Lien's visit. President Chen has ordered government and ruling party officials to take a much milder line in reaction to PRC President Hu Jintao's reported April 18 invitation to People First Party (PFP) Chairman James Soong. However, Chen administration officials are not decided on whether to use Soong's visit to convey a message to PRC interlocutors. End Summary.

Talking to the Enemy

12. (SBU) Despite a call between Presidential Office Secretary General Yu Shyi-kun and KMT Secretary General Lin Fong-cheng on April 15, President Chen and KMT Chairman Lien continued to trade public barbs over the April 16-17 weekend. On April 16, Chen told a group of Rotary members that the last time the KMT and CCP initialed a formal agreement was 1945, which resulted four years later in the loss of Mainland China. Chen asked sarcastically if the KMT was now trying to lose Taiwan as well. Chen criticized the KMT's position that the KMT and CCP share a common commitment to "one China," asserting that acquiescing to "one China" would mean accepting Beijing's "one country, two systems" model. During an April 17 speech in Singapore, Lien responded by accusing Chen of ruining Taiwan's economy through his "populist" leadership.

13. (C) Despite Chen's vitriolic attacks on Lien's loyalties, the Presidential Office spokesman reiterated on April 18 the President's willingness to endorse Lien's visit after the two leaders held discussions. KMT SecGen Lin told reporters on April 16 that the KMT would consider an offer from Presidential Office SecGen Yu for Lien to contact Chen by phone before his departure for the Mainland. However, Yu aide Lin You-chang told AIT on April 18 that the exchange between the two Secretaries General was brief and non-substantive. Lin said that no provisions were made for further consultations between the two officials. KMT SecGen Lin departed Taipei on April 18 to Beijing for talks with PRC counterparts in advance of Lien's upcoming visit.

14. (C) NSC Senior Advisor for cross-Strait affairs Chen Chung-hsin told AIT that the KMT would likely agree to at least a phone call between Lien and the President before Lien departs, if only to protect Lien from Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) attacks on his loyalty. Chen expressed confidence, however, that Lien would not sign any formal agreement with PRC counterparts during his visit. Chen stated that the NSC's assessment is that it is Beijing, not the KMT, which is backing away from its initial enthusiasm over contacts with the KMT. Chen noted a series of recent PRC public statements appeared to be calibrated to dispel the impression that Beijing had chosen the KMT as its preferred conduit. Chen remarked that the government's assessment that Lien Chan is now more eager than Beijing to achieve a KMT-CCP "breakthrough" is driving the President to take an even harder public line against the KMT.

PFP: The Preferred Pan-Blue Party

15. (C) The NSC's Chen told AIT that the President has instructed government agencies and the DPP to make a clear

distinction between their public treatment of Lien and PFP Chairman Soong, who received a public invitation from the PRC to visit on April 18. The PFP immediately accepted the invitation, extended in the name of President Hu Jintao. Chen said that the government will use the same basic public line with Soong as they have towards Lien -- that any party leader should visit Beijing only after consulting with the government. However, the Chen administration will use Soong as a positive example of government-opposition coordination to contrast with the KMT's example, Chen added. Chen said that the government has not made a decision yet whether to use Soong as a conduit to convey any messages to Beijing.

Comment: Continued Friction

16. (C) With the Chen administration calculating that Lien will eventually acquiesce to call the President and that Beijing will not sign any formal accord with the KMT, President Chen appears to feel little need to moderate his public criticism of Lien Chan. Even if the President's assessment over Lien's visit is accurate, the increasingly bitter public recrimination being traded between the two sides will likely spill over and poison other DPP-KMT contacts. Among other things, we expect that they will make it harder to resume normal operations in the Legislative Yuan (LY). AIT will continue to remind leaders on both sides of the need to maintain at least a modicum of civility in order to advance Taiwan's broader legislative objectives after the Lien visit has concluded.
PAAL